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SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA/ARPI, NEA/PPD, NEA/P, IIP/G/NEA

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: OMAN ONLINE: SHINAS SHOOTING, EQUALITY, AND ARRESTS

REF: MUSCAT 743 AND PREVIOUS

1. Summary: The Omani Internet chat rooms "al-Sablah" and "al-Majarra" are the liveliest and most comprehensive Arabic-language fora for political and social discourse in the country, touching on issues and personalities rarely addressed in the conventional media. While not totally free, nor wholly reflective of Omani public opinion, these popular sites nevertheless offer a worthwhile window into the hot topics and unvarnished views of the day. This edition of Oman Online contains the following topics:

-- Young Omani Allegedly Killed By Police In Shinas
-- Signing of CEDAW
-- More Arrests?

End summary.

Police Shooting In Shinas

2. Al-Sablah participants reported an unsubstantiated story out of Shinas, a port city about 300 km. northwest of Muscat. Local police allegedly shot a young Omani male, suspected of smuggling, who had refused to stop for a car inspection. Though the story has not been independently corroborated, al-Sablah subscribers reacted strongly: "How can the police shoot a person who is not carrying a weapon and did not attack them?" Others reported that, "The tribe of the young man later raided the police station and beat up the officers," and "The police have orders to arrest anybody who protests this incident." Another respondent offered, "The police refused to hand over the dead body to the family, and the policeman who shot the boy was transferred by helicopter to Muscat for security reasons." Tensions in the area were reported to be high; one writer said, "The police and the government are in chaos, and they don't know what they are doing."

Reverse Discrimination?

3. A royal decree announcing the signing of the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) triggered a discussion on gender equality in the online forum. One contributor wondered, "Will this mean that there will be equal opportunities for university enrollment between men and women? Because everybody knows that females take more university seats than males." Another claimed, "Women have already taken opportunities away from men, yet men have more responsibilities than women." One subscriber warned, "I am scared by the consequences of signing this convention."

Talk Continues

4. Participants continue to discuss the demonstrations and arrests (reftel); recent postings are dominated by requests for information. Some subscribers did identify four military officers by name -- including a colonel -- that had allegedly been arrested in connection with the demonstrations. Another member confided, "The police are ready to arrest certain secondary school teachers as well, but they are waiting for the end of the school year."

BALTIMORE